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Page: 1/3

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INFORMAL WORKING GROUP ON MSMEs*

END OF YEAR WRAP-UP SESSION: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The following communication, dated 6 December 2018, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Uruguay.

The session was convened on 30 November 2018 by H.E. Mr. José Luís Cancela Gómez, Ambassador of Uruguay and General Coordinator of the Informal Working Group (IWG) on MSMEs.

1 REMARKS BY THE GENERAL COORDINATOR

1.1. Ambassador Cancela opened the meeting by welcoming Armenia as the 89th member of the MSME IWG (counting EU Member States individually).

1.2. The Group then adopted its Annual Report for 2018.

1.3. Amb. Cancela debriefed the Group on the consultations held with interested delegations on 21-22 November to discuss the way forward and the organization of work in 2019. A total of 13 delegations had been formally consulted, many of which noted the need for concrete outcomes, with a view towards MC12.

1.4. Amb. Cancela outlined three key objectives for next year: 1) to achieve concrete deliverables; 2) to expand the Group's membership; and 3) to secure commitment by Ministers at MC12 and aim for a ministerial declaration.

1.5. Further, Amb. Cancela proposed a work programme for 2019 based on a standing agenda (see annex 1). The standing agenda would discuss thematic work of interest to the Group; review outreach activities to expand MSME membership; and review work relevant to MSMEs done in other WTO Committees to avoid duplication of effort. He emphasized the Group's analytical role and proposed various issues for further investigation by the Secretariat, including TPRs, mapping national trade finance programmes and *de minimis*. He proposed that the Group hold four regular meetings a year based on the agreed standing agenda. If other issues of interest are raised by the Group that require more in-depth discussions, Amb. Cancela invited Members to organize thematic sessions outside of the standing MSME IWG meetings.

1.6. During the consultations, one member proposed the idea of a public webpage that could provide information and links to MSMEs about where to find trade information relevant to them. Amb. Cancela proposed that if the current internal WTO MSME webpage cannot be made public, perhaps a general webpage with useful links such as the Global Trade Helpdesk, online WTO resources, and a list of national contact points could be developed instead. He invited members to discuss the possible content of such a webpage.

1.7. Regarding institutional arrangements, Amb. Cancela suggested the need for the Group to engage more actively with the private sector and for a change in the Group's coordinating structure. He suggested holding regular meetings with representatives of the private sector to hear their views,

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and proposed a lighter, more flexible and pragmatic coordinating process with members taking the lead on subjects of interest, rather than continuing with a formal coordinating committee and thematic sessions as took place over 2018.

2 DISCUSSION

2.1. Various delegations gave interventions following Amb. Cancela's presentation. Members confirmed Amb. Cancela as General Coordinator of the MSME IWG and supported the proposed way forward, including the idea to conduct future meetings based on a standing agenda. Several members indicated that they would submit proposals for the Group to consider under agenda item 1 (thematic work).

2.2. Members also supported Amb. Cancela's call for closer ties with other WTO Committees and Joint Initiatives, including the e-Commerce Joint Initiative and the Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance.

2.3. As the MSME IWG continues to expand its membership with the aim of a multilateral outcome at MC12, a member underscored the need to step up outreach efforts to certain groups, such as the LDC Group.

2.4. Several delegations stressed the particular needs of MSMEs in landlocked countries. Amb. Cancela suggested that interested members join together and look into specific proposals to address this difficulty.

3 NEXT STEPS

3.1. The first 2019 MSME Informal Working Group plenary meeting is expected to be held in early February.

ANNEX

PROPOSED STANDING AGENDA FOR 2019 MSME IWG MEETINGS

Item 1 – Thematic work

- A. Transparency cluster (would include issues related to access to information, information sharing, and TPRs).
- B. Thematic cluster (exchange of national experiences (best practices) and development of guidelines/recommendations on various issues such as trade finance, national contact points, logistics, *de minimis*).
- C. Analytical tools cluster (work on data collection).
- D. Conceptual cluster (explore the relevance of developing and promoting general principles such as the "think small principle").

Item 2 – Review of outreach activities

- with other Members;
- with other organizations [this could include with the ICC; the World SME Forum; etc.].

Item 3 – MSME-related discussions in other WTO Committees

Chairs of regular WTO Bodies would be invited to brief the MSME Informal Working Group on MSME-related discussions in their respective committees.

This item could also be an opportunity to coordinate positions or actions of the MSME Informal Working Group in these committees.

Item 4 – [adoption of the annual report – for end-of-year meeting only]

Item 4 or 5 – Other business
